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**Environment Department to Require Accelerated Investigation
of Groundwater Pollution at LANL**

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) today ordered the University of California and the U.S. Department of Energy, operators of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, to develop an aggressive investigation and cleanup program to determine the source and magnitude of chromium contamination found in the aquifer used for the drinking water supply for the laboratory, the town of Los Alamos, and White Rock.

NMED's directive to the lab follows a determination also made today by NMED that the lab must take action now to reduce or prevent migration of chromium and other contaminants which have or may result in an unacceptable risk to human health or the environment. These actions are to be taken while long-term corrective action remedies are being evaluated and implemented. The lab's workplan must be submitted to NMED for review and approval within 90 days.

"NMED's actions today are a direct outgrowth of the fence-to-fence cleanup Order on Consent I signed in March (2005), which required the investigation that revealed the chromium contamination," said NMED Secretary Ron Curry. "Perhaps more importantly, the Order gives the State the authority to direct accelerated work, so that the citizenry that relies on groundwater beneath the laboratory for its drinking water is protected."

The Laboratory notified NMED on December 23, 2005 of the contamination found in a monitoring well in Mortandad Canyon at levels 4 times the drinking water standard, and 8 times the State groundwater quality standard, of 100 parts per billion (ppb) and 50 ppb, respectively. The results were from samples taken in May, September, and November of 2005. LANL failed to notify NMED of a previous sample taken in January, 2004 from the same well, that showed chromium at levels over twice the drinking water standard.

“I’m very concerned about the lab’s apparent failure to notify NMED and the public of this contamination in a timely manner,” added Curry. “I am hopeful that the new lab leadership will take the appropriate steps to ensure the lab’s environmental programs are transparent and such crucial information does not fall through the cracks again.”

Chromium has not been detected above drinking water standards in any of the water supply wells that serve the lab or nearby communities. Chromium was used extensively in the past at the laboratory in plating operations, and as a treatment to prevent scaling and fouling of cooling towers at the lab’s power plants. Chromium occurs in two states; “trivalent chromium” (or chrome III) is an essential nutrient, and relatively insoluble. “Hexavalent” chromium (or chrome VI) is very soluble, and when ingested through drinking chromium-contaminated drinking water can cause kidney and liver damage, and through reduction in the body can cause cancer. Awareness of the hazards and toxicity of chromium VI was heightened with the 2000 release of the film *Erin Brockovich*, in which the title character investigated the chromium VI contamination of a large water supply in California.

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